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Translating Contemporary French Poetry

Emma Wagstaff and Nina Parish

Introduction

Et sur quelques causes de l'état present [...]¹

This article considers the presence(s) of recent French poetry in English translation, examining a bilingual anthology edited by the authors and published in 2016. It argues that the process of editing an anthology of contemporary poetry with multiple translators is a form of re-writing that not only introduces new writers into the target-language poetic system, but also recasts their positions in the poetic system of the source culture. This is achieved in two ways: first, by making them accessible to an audience unfamiliar with the poetic system of the source culture, readers who will then approach them without preconceptions of where they fit into that system; and, second, by proposing new juxtapositions of poetic texts to readers who are familiar with the categories into which the poetry is usually placed. There is little critical examination of anthologizing; André Lefevere's discussion provides a solid starting point, but does not consider the effects an anthology can have on a source culture system.² Our article offers an important extension to the theory he proposes, at the same time as providing a new perspective on the contemporary French poetic scene.

Anthologizing operates in tandem with translating in this instance, and we additionally use the notions of inference and cognitive stylistics to discuss the particular *habitus* of academic translators who are not poets, and the opportunities those approaches offer to produce a creative translation. Style is an appropriate lens through which to consider poems included in this anthology because it is a contested question in contemporary French poetic practice: some writers consider that there is no such thing as a separate poetic language. The article therefore treats the question of *présence* that this special issue addresses in three ways. It discusses, on the most literal level, the new or more visible presence that French poetry can acquire in the anglophone context through translation and anthologies. Moreover, it examines the ways in which the presence of new or decontextualized voices affects poetic systems. Finally, it considers whether an approach to translation that sees it as an embodied, interpretative process may allow some access to the *présence* of the 'original' poetic work.

¹ Anne Portugal, *Définitif bob* (Paris: P. O. L, 2002), cited in *Writing the Real: a Bilingual Anthology of Contemporary French Poetry*, ed. by Nina Parish and Emma Wagstaff (London: Enitharmon, 2016), p. 52.

² André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2017 (1992)), pp. 93–102.

Anthologizing as re-writing

In *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, Lefevere includes a chapter on anthologizing as a form of rewriting. He studies examples of anthologies of African poetry translated into English and French that thereby combine two kinds of rewriting: translating and ‘anthologizing’. He argues that an anthology shapes the canon of translated work in the target culture, even though subsequent anthologies may go on to challenge that.³ While editors in their introductions tend to lament the lack of space for including all the work they would have liked to introduce to their readership, and suggest that the choice they have made is necessarily arbitrary, in fact the amount of space available and, to a certain extent, the choice of source texts, are determined by publishing constraints. Publishers must consider the likely audience for the volume, always mindful of production costs in relation to the small audiences poetry attracts. According to Lefevere, there is a tendency among editorial decision-makers to focus on ‘analogy’ and ‘exoticism’. Publishers make judgments about the ways in which potential readers might be able to ‘place’ the translated poetry that is new to them in relation to the poetry they already know in their own language, as well as assuming that readers will be attracted to new, unfamiliar voices from the source culture.⁴ The contention of Lefevere’s book overall is that various kinds of rewriting bring different literary systems together and shape their development. Nevertheless, in his discussions of translation decisions, he tends to present the translator as affected by individual ideology and literary and publishing systems, rather than as agents involved in shaping the canon.⁵

Our anthology was commissioned by Enitharmon Press, with the suggestion that we should include around four pages of text from each of ten to twenty poets. The extracts should be selected from among those who, first, were young ‘in spirit’ if not necessarily in age; second, took a broadly political approach to their poetry; and, finally, were little known in the United

³ Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, p. 95.

⁴ Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, p. 96.

⁵ Rakefet Sela-Sheffy argues that translators variously conform to and challenge norms in ‘How to be a (recognized) translator: Rethinking habitus, norms, and the field of translation’, *Target*, 17:1 (2005), 1–26. Theo Hermans had argued in a critique of Lefevere’s earlier discussion of rewrites that the latter’s case studies highlight ‘the power of patronage exercised through ideological constraints’, but do not take fully into account ‘the fact that these constraints must operate within and through specific social and institutional structures’: Theo Hermans, *Translation in Systems: Descriptive and System-oriented Approaches Explained* (Manchester: St Jerome, 1999), p. 129. He is referring to Lefevere’s chapter ‘Why Waste Our Time on Rewrites? The Trouble with Interpretation and the Role of Rewriting in an Alternative Paradigm’, in *The Manipulation of Literature. Studies in Literary Translation*, ed. by Theo Hermans (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 215–43; it could be suggested that Lefevere’s subsequent *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* does take more account of social and institutional structures, as evidenced by its discussion of publishers’ practical considerations when determining the parameters of anthologies.

Kingdom and perhaps not established figures in the francophone context either. These conditions imply that the publisher was prepared to take a risk in publishing works that the target audience might not be able to place. The publisher, Stephen Stuart-Smith, favoured a selection of writing that would enable readers to engage with a relatively restricted number of authors rather than attempting a snapshot of a poetry scene that, owing to the length of the volume, would be far from comprehensive. The conditions imply that he wished to tap into a renewed interest — in literary circles at least — in the role of poetry as politically engaged.⁶ It was not difficult to fulfil the brief of finding poets little known in the United Kingdom, even though recent statistical analyses of the publication of translated literature are encouraging. There was a steady growth in the number of translated literary titles between 2000 and 2015, with approximately 4.5% of all fiction, poetry and drama titles published in the United Kingdom being translations.⁷ French is the most translated language. Poetry contends with children's literature for second place as the most translated genre, with fiction in first place. As a proportion of literary texts translated poetry has declined from 19.88% in 2000 to 13.05% in 2015, but this nevertheless represents a healthy proportion compared to poetry's low sales.⁸

All the poets included in the anthology consider themselves to be political in their decisions about language use, although most do not write explicitly about political events or concerns.⁹ The pairings of poets and translators are as follows:

Christian Prigent	<i>Jérôme Game</i>
Nathalie Quintane	<i>Macgregor Card</i>
Pierre Alferi	<i>Kate Lermite Campbell</i>
Michèle Métail	<i>Susan Wicks</i>
Anne Portugal	<i>Jennifer Moxley</i>
Jean-Michel Maulpoix	<i>Michael Bishop</i>

⁶ At an event at Liverpool University's Centre for New and International Writing, the otherwise very different editors of the review *Modern Poetry in Translation* (Sasha Dugdale and former editor David Constantine) and of the recent collection *Currently and Emotion* (London: Test Centre, 2016), Sophie Collins, described translation as a political act (22/02/17). See also the following set of interviews that appeared on the website of Publishers' Weekly in March 2017: <<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/new-titles/adult-announcements/article/73236-the-poetic-is-political-poetry-2017.html>> [last accessed 07/06/17].

⁷ Julia Trentacosti and Jennifer Nicholls, 'Publishing Translated Literature in the United Kingdom and Ireland 1990-2015: Statistical Report Update' (September 2017), p. 2: <https://www.lit-across-frontiers.org/research/making-literature-travel-research-reports-downloads/> [last accessed 15/03/18].

⁸ Trentacosti and Nicholls, 'Publishing Translated Literature', p. 8 [last accessed 15/03/18].

⁹ An exception would be Jean-Marie Gleize, whose volume *Tarnac* (Paris: Seuil, 2011) presents the treatment of a group of young people who set up a cooperative in the village of Tarnac in 2008 and called it an 'anarcho-autonomist cell'. They were arrested on suspicion of plotting terrorist offences, the charge being made on the basis of their publication of a book on living in exile from capitalist society. Gleize also weaves in the story of a May '68 activist who drowned fleeing the police. An extract is included in *Writing the Real*, translated by Joshua Clover, Abigail Lang and Bonnie Roy (pp. 108–17), and first published by Kenning Editions in 2014.

Sabine Macher	<i>Simone Forti</i>
Jérôme Game	<i>Barbara Beck</i>
Christophe Tarkos	<i>Jérôme Game</i>
Oscarine Bosquet	<i>Simone Fattal & Cole Swensen</i> <i>Sarah Riggs and Ellen LeBlond-Schrader</i>
Anne-James Chaton	<i>Nina Parish</i>
Jean-Marie Gleize	<i>Joshua Clover, Abigail Lang & Bonnie Roy</i>
Béatrice Bonhomme	<i>Michael Bishop</i>
Stéphane Bouquet	<i>Michelle Noteboom</i>
Philippe Beck	<i>Emma Wagstaff</i>
Sandra Moussempès	<i>Eléna Rivera</i>
Gilles Ortlieb	<i>Stephen Romer</i>
Jean-Michel Espitallier	<i>Keston Sutherland</i>

While the writers tend to employ the term ‘experimental’ rather than ‘avant-garde’, some of them can be placed in relation to avant-garde poetry in the United Kingdom, as poets from both sides of the Channel occasionally collaborate on poetry readings and translate one another’s work. Examples include author-translator pairing Jean-Michel Espitallier and Keston Sutherland, or the activities of Jérôme Game, a French poet who has lived and performed his work in France, Britain and the United States. Several of the poets and translators have been involved in the Double-Change collective, which works principally to bring together French and American writers, but has also recently staged events that include British poets.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the reach of such activities remains limited, and the potential readership for the anthology is likely to be primarily one that is not already familiar with the names of the poets included. Nor will it be easy for readers to ‘place’ the writers in relation to the French poetry that has previously been translated, such as major nineteenth-century figures (Hugo, Lamartine, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Mallarmé, for instance), early-twentieth-century Modernism (Guillaume Apollinaire, for example), or the Surrealists (including André Breton and Paul Éluard). The writers included, all born after 1945, come after the generation who started writing in the 1950s and 1960s and who grappled with the legacy of Surrealism.¹¹ In terms of literary systems, we are publishing — and in some instances introducing — new writers who have a marginal status even in the source culture system. The work of the following poets is not likely to be known to a readership in the United Kingdom with an interest in contemporary

¹⁰ Double-Change: <<http://doublechange.org>> [last accessed 10/07/17].

¹¹ Those poets who began writing in the 1950s and who have sought to define the image outside surrealist understandings of the ‘marvellous’, include Yves Bonnefoy (1923-2016) and Philippe Jaccottet (1925–).

poetry, even though most have been previously translated into English: Nathalie Quintane, Sabine Macher, Oscarine Bosquet, Anne-James Chaton, Béatrice Bonhomme, Stéphane Bouquet, Philippe Beck and Sandra Moussempès. Depending on the size of the readership, the anthology will go some way towards establishing a canon of previously unknown or little-known contemporary French poetic writers translated into English and published in the United Kingdom. Lefevere argues that, when a poetics is established, those writers whose work corresponds to it tend to be viewed as exemplary.¹² Therefore the combination of Enitharmon's instruction that poets with a political motive should be included, and our decision as editors to choose writers with a range of approaches, but emphasizing those who consider themselves to be working with the language of the everyday, will affect the impression of contemporary French poetry gained by readers.

Writers published by P. O. L, and, more recently, by Al Dante, are often influenced by the trend known as 'littéralité', and reject the notion that there might be a separate poetic language, accessible to a select few individuals.¹³ While they do not constitute a single movement, and different tendencies have been noted, certain common concerns can be identified.¹⁴ Taking philosophical inspiration from Wittgenstein, 'literalist' writers insist that using everyday language is democratic and therefore political, and frequently reuse existing texts, whether written or filmic, literary or non-literary practical documents, placing them in new contexts and suggesting novel perspectives on them. This moves on from the cut-up technique practised by poets such as Emmanuel Hocquard, and influenced by American Objectivists, because the aim is to combine the mechanical and the lyrical into an artisanal approach.¹⁵ Jean-Marie Gleize has been a key figure through publications including *À Noir. Poésie et littéralité*.¹⁶ Often placed in contradistinction and even conflict with the 'littéralistes' are the 'poètes nouveau-lyriques' whose approach has been influenced by Jean-Michel Maulpoix.¹⁷ They propose an understanding of poetry as voice and offering, and consider themselves close to the poets of *présence* of the post-1945 period, who

¹² Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, p. 22.

¹³ Work in the anthology originally published by P. O. L is by the following writers: Christian Prigent, Nathalie Quintane, Pierre Alferi, Anne Portugal, Christophe Tarkos; Al Dante published texts by Oscarine Bosquet and Anne-James Chaton.

¹⁴ Nathalie Wourm sets out the differences between them as well as the perspectives they share in her introduction to a volume of interviews she conducted with sixteen poets: 'Introduction', *Poètes français du 21^e siècle: entretiens*, ed. by Nathalie Wourm (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 1–9. She argues that the poets interviewed are influenced by Derrida and Deleuze in their wish to deconstruct and 'deterritorialize' poetry.

¹⁵ Wourm, 'Introduction', p. 4.

¹⁶ Jean-Marie Gleize, *À noir. Poésie et littéralité* (Paris: Seuil, 1983). Seuil, which also published *Tarnac*, from which the extracts in the anthology are taken, is a mainstream publisher.

¹⁷ An example of his writing is included in *Writing the Real*, pp. 60–63. He is editor of *Le Nouveau recueil*, which tends to publish writers with an approach similar to his own. Gleize edited *Nioques*, and similarly influenced its direction, while several of the other poets included in the anthology also founded reviews.

in turn looked to Hölderlin in their search for a means to approach a sense of presence, often in the natural landscape, while acknowledging that this remains necessarily just out of reach.

Many French poets of the twenty-first century, and the critics who respond to their work, now frequently argue that the distinction between those approaches should no longer apply, and that is also what we propose in our introduction to the anthology.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it remains the case that the reader of contemporary French poetry tends to situate writers in relation to one tendency or the other, and that the question still causes tension and occasionally conflict at poetic gatherings. We opened our introduction to the anthology with quotations from Maulpoix and Gleize. The anglophone reader might notice similarities between the extracts: the evocation of a figure in a landscape, perhaps, contemplating the trees and questions of mortality:

Une vie n'est que cela : par là, quelqu'un fut de passage.

Imaginer Orphée, loin des montagnes thraces, se perdant dans la neige, suivi d'un long cortège de bêtes et d'arbres glacés. Toujours, un homme qui ne va nulle part marche sur la route.¹⁹

Tu voulais photographier la nuit. Tu voyais le haut des arbres se détacher sur le ciel et c'était comme les dents d'une scie. Tu as tiré au hasard, lancé tes mains vers l'acier dur et froid qui coupait le ciel. Tu as pensé : 'il n'y a plus rien entre Dieu et nous'.²⁰

A reader with prior knowledge of the contemporary French poetic scene, on the other hand, would see the names of the two authors and immediately situate them as representing opposing tendencies. She might focus on Maulpoix's reference to Orpheus and suggestion of the fleeting human presence on earth, and note the contrast with Gleize's insistence on the materiality of the photograph, which is actually included in his text and its translation, and description of an action. These two approaches are far from defining the whole poetic scene, of course. The written format of the anthology means that we were only able to allude in our introduction to important and diverse developments in performance poetry, rather than including examples in the corpus. There is scope for a digital or audio-visual anthology in the future.

Rewritings of the kind undertaken here do not just include a writer in a new literary system; they also contribute to changing the parameters of the whole system.²¹ One instance of

¹⁸ Michel Collot, 'Lyrisme et littéralité', *Lendemain*, 134–35 (2009), 14–24; Parish and Wagstaff, 'Introduction', in *Writing the Real*, pp. 9–19. Wourm maintains the divide, describing 'nouveau lyrisme' as 'un conservatisme': 'Introduction', p. 7.

¹⁹ Jean-Michel Maulpoix, *Pas sur la neige* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2004), cited in *Writing the Real*, ed. by Parish and Wagstaff, p. 9.

²⁰ Jean-Marie Gleize, *Tarnac*, cited in *Writing the Real*, ed. by Parish and Wagstaff, p. 9.

this would be the ways in which the definition of poetry based on its form in turn redefines our understanding of poetry. Free verse is now the norm, in both French-language and English-language poetry, and anglophone readers with an interest in French poetry are likely to be aware of the uniquely French form of the prose poem since Baudelaire (as distinct from poetic prose). Yet many of the writers included in this anthology write prose, but would consider themselves poets; others favour the label ‘écrivain’, but are happy for their work to be included in an anthology of poetry. Moreover, those writers who can be associated with ‘new lyricism’ also favour the prose form almost exclusively.

We would also like to propose — and this is the key point of our article and one of the aims of the anthology — that bilingual anthologies bringing together multiple authors are capable of challenging the parameters of the *source* culture poetic system. That is because the process of ‘removing’ the texts from their source systems and placing them in a new dialogue with one another is a way of freeing them from habits of categorization that have proved constraining. Jean Boase-Beier argues that translation is a way of recognizing that language is bound to culture, and also of freeing it from that culture;²² editing an anthology where different voices are brought together increases the effect she describes. The authors are accessible to new anglophone readers who are much less likely to have prior awareness of the ‘littéraliste’ or ‘nouveau-lyriques’ categories. They therefore encounter the works as examples of poetic writing without immediately situating them in the French national tradition. Moreover, a bilingual anthology might also be read by francophone readers or poets interested in the reception of French poetry in the anglophone context. They see writers juxtaposed who are not normally published side-by-side because they have not been considered to belong to the same ‘famille’, and the new context enables them to take a fresh view on known authors. The publication of a review in the *Cahier critique de poésie* indicates that our volume is being read in France.²³ Poet Gilles Ortlieb, included in the anthology, wrote to give his view of developments in the ‘littéralité’/‘lyrisme’ debate: he suggested that some writers, including Nathalie Quintane and even Jean-Marie Gleize himself, could be seen now to straddle the divide, while in other cases he sensed that it was deepening.²⁴

The remainder of this article will consider the other aspect of rewriting that the anthology undertakes — translation itself — and examine two texts and their translations

²¹ Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, p. 29.

²² Jean Boase-Beier, *Stylistic Approaches to Translation* (Manchester: St Jerome, 2006), p. 23.

²³ Narciso Aksayam, ‘Writing the Real. A Bilingual Anthology of Contemporary French Poetry’, *Cahier critique de poésie* (2018) <<http://cahiercritiquedepoesie.fr/ccp-34-5/writing-the-real-a-bilingual-antology-of-contemporary-french-poetry>> [last accessed 27 March 2018].

²⁴ Gilles Ortlieb, letter to the editors (January 2017).

through the lens of translation challenges. The first poet, Philippe Beck, writes in a style characterized by particular features that pose difficulties for the translator; the second, Anne-James Chaton, is one of those writers who claims to reject style altogether. What are the implications of these different approaches for translators who are not themselves poets, and for readers who, as suggested above, do not have prior knowledge of the contemporary French poetic scene?

Style, inference and embodied interpretation

Anthologies of translated work have a particular relationship with the question of style in translation. Robert Lowell, in the introduction to his anthology *Imitations* (1958), argues that he strove to unite the disparate works included with the single voice of the translator.²⁵ This is one example of a broader contention that a translator's voice emerges across the body of her work, despite the different styles of the authors she translates.²⁶ Nevertheless, Boase-Beier argues, it is reasonable to suggest that translating work for an anthology is a way of being stylistically free, as the multiple voices of the source texts allow the translator to adopt a range of styles.²⁷ In the case of an anthology with multiple translators, many more voices proliferate. Our anthology contains work by eighteen authors. One translator, Michael Bishop, has translated two poets (Béatrice Bonhomme and Jean-Michel Maulpoix) whose writing is stylistically similar. In his work as translator of complete volumes of poetry and as editor of a small publishing house (Éditions VVV Editions based in Halifax, Nova Scotia), Bishop is closely associated with poetry that might be labelled metaphysical or 'nouveau-lyrique'. He also straddles the British and North American contexts, having been born and educated in the United Kingdom, but spent his working life teaching in Canada, and publishing research as frequently in French as in English. One poet included in the anthology, Jérôme Game, has also provided us with access to translations of an extract from a volume by Christian Prigent, who is one of his inspirations, as well as by the late Christophe Tarkos. The texts we included by another poet, Oscarine Bosquet, are translated by two pairs of poet-translators: Simone Fatal and Cole Swenson, and Sarah Riggs and Ellen LeBlond-Schrader; each pair blended their voices in their joint translation.²⁸

²⁵ Robert Lowell, *Imitations* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990 (1958)), cited in Boase-Beier, *Stylistic Approaches to Translation*, p. 65.

²⁶ Boase-Beier, *Stylistic Approaches to Translation*, p. 63. See also Hermans, 'The Translator's Voice in Translated Narration', *Target*, 8 (1) (1996) 23–48.

²⁷ Boase-Beier, *Stylistic Approaches to Translation*, p. 65.

²⁸ The blending of voices in the translation of Gleize's *Tarnac* by Clover, Lang and Roy is another example.

The different translators may therefore take varying approaches to the question of style. If they consider it important to convey the style of the source text, the translation is likely to be a documentary one; if, on the other hand, their aim is to produce a particular effect on the reader of the target text, then the approach is an instrumental one.²⁹ In the case of the anthology presented as case study here, these decisions and results are affected by three factors in addition to the multiple authorial and translatorial voices present. First, as outlined above, a number of the poets included in the volume, particularly those who might be thought to be writing in the tradition of the 'littéralistes', explicitly reject the notion of a poetic style. Second, some of the translators are poets, and some are scholars (a few are both), and their perception of their own place in the literary system, or *habitus*, is likely to affect the approach they take.³⁰ Finally, all but one of the poets whose work is included are still living, providing the translators in many cases with the opportunity to consult them about their intentions in writing the texts, and about translation problems. The latter two factors could be considered related in that the perception by academic translators and by poets of their own status might affect the ways and extent to which they consult the source text authors.

Boase-Beier considers how Relevance Theory might be useful for Translation Studies. She argues that the role of the translator is to make inferences about the intentions of the author, but that that is not the same as attempting to find out what the author's intentions were.³¹ Authors' statements, and answers to questions, thus become one source among others of information available to translators, to be taken into consideration along with other factors such as understanding of the source and target cultures and languages, but not to take precedence over them. This approach is helpful for academic translators who might otherwise feel it is incumbent on them, as critics rather than poets, to ask authors for information about their thought processes and intentions and allow the responses to determine their translation. A theory of inference can legitimize their own interpretative and creative work.³²

Recent 'cognitive' approaches to interpreting literature and to translation insist that poetic language is not qualitatively different from everyday language, and such scholars'

²⁹ Boase-Beier, *Stylistic Approaches to Translation*, p. 57. She is adopting the terminology of Christiane Nord, who sets out three principal text types and argues for the importance of determining the type of text: *Text Analysis in Translation: Theory, Methodology, and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-oriented Text Analysis* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005). A text or translation with a documentary function aims to inform, whereas an instrumental translation seeks to replicate the effect of the text on the source language reader.

³⁰ The term *habitus*, proposed by Bourdieu, has been most clearly developed in the context of Translation Studies by Simeoni, who argues that it relates to the translator's attitudes and experience as a whole, and not just his expertise: 'The pivotal status of the translator's habitus', *Target*, 10, 1–39.

³¹ Boase-Beier, *Stylistic Approaches to Translation*, p. 50.

³² Boase-Beier, *Stylistic Approaches to Translation*, p. 44.

understanding of stylistics is based on the body and the senses as well as narrow cognition.³³

They rely on readers' having built up experience of how the body reacts in different circumstances.³⁴ That is why style is not a matter of particular linguistic choices designed by an author to produce a meaning that the translator must then attempt to convey. Rather, translating style is about reading and interpreting, inferring the 'mind' of the author. In this way it is related to reception theory, including work by Iser, and is also, of course, influenced by translation theorists including Schleiermacher who viewed reading as a constructive activity.³⁵

Such an approach is appropriate to the work of poets and translators from across the supposed divide separating poets of everyday language from poets of presence. Some of their texts, for instance, are an exploration of the body and of senses (Nathalie Quintane's work in our volume is a clear instance of that). Others focus instead on rhythm and musicality that is sensed as much as understood. Poet-translator Yves Bonnefoy argues in *La Communauté des traducteurs* that a translator's aim is to convey not the conceptual content of a poem, but rather the rhythm and music of the lines, and that poetic translation is one where a sense of *présence* such as that which motivated the original author is also experienced by the translator.³⁶ For scholarly translators who are not poets, an embodied stylistic approach, where the translator infers meaning from a variety of sources, strengthens the validity of their translation as an interpretation, granting them licence to understand translation as a creative practice that their status as critics might not otherwise seem to allow. Most would not feel able to claim for themselves the capacity to produce a 'poetic' translation in other circumstances. While Bonnefoy is among the greatest of the poets of *présence*, the application of notions of inference and embodied reading and writing can allow translators of poets with a variety of approaches to produce valid interpretations.

Translating Philippe Beck's 'Mots gelés'³⁷

³³ Boase-Beier, *Stylistic Approaches to Translation*, p. 72–73.

³⁴ P. Verdonk, 'The Liberation of the Icon: A Brief Survey from Classical Rhetoric to Cognitive Stylistics', *Journal of Literary Studies*, 15 (3/4) (1999), 291–304.

³⁵ See, for instance, Wolfgang Iser, 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach', *New Literary History*, 3, 2 (1972), 279–99, and Schleiermacher's 1813 essay 'On the Different Methods of Translation', which is reproduced in *German Romantic Criticism*, ed. by A. L. Willson (New York: Continuum, 1982).

³⁶ Yves Bonnefoy, *La Communauté des traducteurs* (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2000). See, for instance, p. 36. We are grateful to Andrew Rothwell for drawing our attention to this text, and for his invaluable advice to Emma Wagstaff on her translation, discussed below.

³⁷ Philippe Beck, *Opéradiques* (Paris: Flammarion, 2014), pp. 61–67. It is reprinted, with the translation on facing pages, in *Writing the Real*, ed. by Parish and Wagstaff, pp. 136–49. Subsequent references, using the abbreviation *MG*, will be to this volume.

Discovery of the cognitive stylistic approach reoriented Emma Wagstaff's understanding of her role as translator of a poem by Philippe Beck, 'Mots gelés', which is included in the anthology. Beck's work is known as difficult, because it is replete with references to other texts or people from within and far beyond French culture.³⁸ He also experiments with rhythm in verse texts, and has written theoretically about the differences between verse and prose, most recently in *Contre un Boileau*.³⁹ Beck displays verbal inventiveness through the creation of neologisms. All of those features are in evidence in the text 'Mots gelés', to a greater or lesser degree.

Wagstaff has published two pieces on his work so started as translator from the position of some prior familiarity, but she had not previously published any translations of poetry, and is not a poet.⁴⁰ She had had personal contact with Beck through the organization of poetry readings, and that contact meant she was eager to produce a translation that he would recognize as valid. He offered help with references, although it emerged subsequently that she sent him far fewer queries than his German translator typically does.⁴¹ Translations of his work into English are beginning to appear: Univocal Press, for instance, has recently published his *Didactic Poetries*, translated by Nicola Maraé Allain.⁴²

Those factors, and awareness that she could not provide footnotes as in a scholarly article, at first led Wagstaff to conclude that it would make sense to attempt what Peter Newmark names a 'semantic' translation. It is appropriate for literary texts because it takes into account the interweaving of 'form' and 'content' and attempts to preserve the author's peculiarities of expression. The syntax and rhythms are as important as the words, and there is bound to be some loss of meaning.⁴³ Newmark argues that semantic translation of 'difficult texts [...] is inevitably selective because it requires interpretation'.⁴⁴ This approach therefore seems appropriate to translating Beck's poetry, although it does not necessarily help the novice translator decide how to translate the combination of form and sense or what to select in the translation of difficult texts.

³⁸ That is one of the ways in which, according to Michel Deguy, poetry might be deemed 'unreadable': Michel Deguy, 'De l'illisibilité', in *L'illisibilité en questions: avec Michel Deguy*, Jean-Marie Gleize, Christian Prigent, Nathalie Quintane, ed. by Bénédicte Gorrillot and Alain Lescart (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du septentrion, 2014), pp. 19–29 (20–22).

³⁹ Philippe Beck, *Contre un Boileau* (Paris: Fayard, 2015).

⁴⁰ Emma Wagstaff, "'Le Temps rhumain': Time in the Work of Philippe Beck", in *Poetic Practice and the Practice of Poetics in French since 1945*, ed. by Hugues Azérad, Michael G. Kelly, Nina Parish, and Emma Wagstaff (= double special issue of *French Forum*, 37, 1–2 (2012), 223–235; Emma Wagstaff, 'La musique dans l'œuvre récente de Philippe Beck', *Nu(e)*, 60 (2016), pp. 55–67.

⁴¹ See Philippe Beck, *Populäre Gesänge*, transl. by Tim Trzaskalik (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2011).

⁴² Philippe Beck, *Didactic Poetries*, transl. by Nicola Maraé Allain (Minnesota: Univocal Press, 2016).

⁴³ Peter Newmark, *Approaches to Translation* (Oxford and New York: Pergamon, 1981), p. 47.

⁴⁴ Newmark, *Approaches to Translation*, p. 60.

An understanding of inference, however, suggests ways in which the translator might interpret the text while aiming at a semantic translation. It was possible to integrate the poet's answers to questions along with knowledge of his other work, including those interpretations proposed by thinkers whose writings might be more familiar to an anglophone academic readership than is Beck's poetry: Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Rancière have both published discussions of his work in English.⁴⁵ The *présence* of 'Mots gelés' in English via this anthology is therefore mediated by those other readings as well as by the translator's understanding of the text based on Beck's comments and the extent and limits of her knowledge of the multiple references to other cultural sources and artefacts that pepper the poem. The role of the translator of a text containing such references is partly to interpret the relative 'foreignness' of those references.

It quickly becomes evident to a reader with knowledge of French literature that Beck's poem is referring to work by François Rabelais, as 'Gargantua', 'Panurge' and 'Pantagruel' are mentioned, although Rabelais's name does not occur until near the end and there are no footnotes or explanatory glosses. Entitled 'Mots gelés', the poem is in large part a re-writing of the 'Paroles gelées' episode from *Le Quart Livre* (1552), which is much less well known than Rabelais's *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*. Discovering this reference, which is not made explicit in the poem, allowed the translator to consult English-language translations of *Le Quart Livre* and use and adapt the parts of the text that have been transferred directly by Beck; that approach requires caution, however, because the differing translations are the earliest and most recent available, dating from the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries respectively.⁴⁶ Other literary references include Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), which might conceivably be better known to the target audience than to the source one, and *Wallenstein* (1800) by Schiller.

'Mots gelés', therefore, is itself a kind of translation, and the reader realizes that Beck is employing techniques of inference as he draws on Rabelais' *Quart livre* but also interprets it according to his own frame of reference. Moreover, investigation of the episode of the 'Paroles gelées' reveals that Rabelais's text is also a highly complex translation whose sources, according to M.A. Screech, include: 'Plutarch, Aristotle, Plato, Ammonius Hermaeus, Celio Calcagnini and that great mass of commentaries on Roman law which formed the delight of so many

⁴⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy wrote a preface to *Didactic Poetries* by Philippe Beck, transl. by Nicola Maraé Allain, and Jacques Rancière published *The Groove of the Poem: Reading Philippe Beck* (Minnesota: Univocal Press, 2016).

⁴⁶ François Rabelais, *The Fourth Book*, transl. by Peter Antony Motteux (1708), available via Project Gutenberg: <<http://gutenberg.readingroo.ms/1/2/0/1200/1200-h/1200-h.htm>> [last accessed 11/07/17]. François Rabelais, *The Fourth Book of Pantagruel* (1552), in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, translated and edited with an Introduction and Notes by M. A. Screech (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2006), pp. 619-872.

Renaissance authors'.⁴⁷ The episode plays out over two chapters, after Pantagruel and Panurge have been caught on a ship in a great storm with Frère Jean, and Panurge's fear has emerged via meaningless babble, which turns out not to be so meaningless after all because it conveys his inner turmoil. The social and religious context is the upheaval of the Council of Trent, and Rabelais's exposure of what he perceived to be the empty sanctimonious language of many Catholics. In the first chapter, he can be said to be investigating the relationship between truth and language, and to be attempting to reconcile the debate over Cratylus and the extent to which 'natural language' exists, with Biblical teachings about divinely-inspired words. In the second chapter, which is the one Beck uses most, Rabelais examines the relationship between words, noise and gesture. He is prompted partly by the debate in Roman law as to whether a deaf and mute person can testify in court by gesture, and whether lip-read words can be accepted as evidence. In that chapter, the pilot of the ship, as he is called, tells of sounds from a battle as Pantagruel and others throw words onto the deck and they thaw out. Rabelais jokes with the idea of seeing words, as a lip-reader would do, and describes them in visual and other sensory ways. Rabelais experiments and uses puns to convey this in a manner that makes him what Beck believes to be the most verbally inventive of all French writers.⁴⁸ Words can be meaningful or not, comprehensible or not, but their comprehensibility does not determine whether they are meaningful. The episode is thought to illustrate and develop Rabelais's theory of language. Beck's aim, in turn, is not to explicate Rabelais, but rather to do what he did, and present us with the conundrum of how to respond to thawing words, which is not restricted to an attempt to understand their semantic meaning. It is a good model for translation based on a cognitive approach.

'Mots gelés' is a long verse poem, without subsections, of about a thousand words. It has lines of varying lengths. Rabelais's text is prose divided into short chapters, including a great deal of dialogue not reproduced by Beck, so his 'translation' is one of form as well as content. Most of the 'frozen words' episode appears, more or less transfigured, but the narrative is not presented in the same order, and the poem is not confined to it.

The most pressing semantic translation problem was the difference between 'mots' and 'paroles'; both are used by Beck, with the title of his poem operating a transfer from the 'paroles gelées' of Rabelais's source. Rabelais used 'paroles' more frequently than 'mots', and the reverse is true for Beck. On the whole, 'paroles' appear to be presented as physical entities, in lines such as 'Les paroles gèlent en l'air sévère' (*MG*, p. 140). This is particularly noticeable in the part of

⁴⁷ M. A. Screech, *Rabelais* (London: Duckworth, 1979), p. 216.

⁴⁸ Personal interview with the author, Paris, April 2015.

the story that is central to the episode, when the words defrost on the deck of the ship, but ‘mots’ are also visible at times:

On voit des mots de craie, des mots refaits,
des mots de gueule (plaisantés) ou d’azur,
des mots de sable,
des mots dorés, échauffés dans des mains;
ils fondent comme neige. (MG, p. 140)

For the English translation, Wagstaff adopted ‘words’ to translate ‘mots’ and ‘speech’ for ‘paroles’. Some nuances of Beck’s choices will necessarily have been lost, although the use of a parallel text presentation means that the reader can cross-reference.

You see chalk words, remade words,
red-throated words (in jest) or azure words
sable words,
golden words, warmed up by hands;
they melt like snow. (MG, p. 141)

The choice of employing ‘words’ and ‘speech’ is prompted partly by the sense that the difference between spoken and written words is key to Beck’s poem. This is an inference and the question of translating those two words was not among those she put to Beck.

The translator’s *habitus* plays a further role in the translation of neologism, which is a characteristic feature of this text as it is of Beck’s output in general. Not being a native French speaker, the translator in this instance could not always be sure whether an unfamiliar term used was a neologism or simply a word she did not yet know. While careful research is of course needed to eliminate mistranslations of an existing word into a neologism, a translation premised on inference can legitimately interpret the number of neologisms needed in the target text on the basis of conveying the relative sense of foreignness to standard language use that the source text produces, without necessarily adopting a foreignizing agenda. Examples of neologism include the following: ‘Raidies et froidies.’ (MG, p. 136), translated as ‘Rigid and colded.’ (MG, p. 137); ‘On les entend *réalement*’ (MG, p. 140): ‘You hear them *like real*’ (MG, p. 141), where the italics appear to emphasize the unusual formulation; and

Vues, revues, lues, relues,

paperassées et feuilletées, comme compulsoires
et déclinatoires, etc. (*MG*, p. 144)

Seen, reseen, read, reread,
paperworked and flicked through, as if consultive
and declinative, etc. (*MG*, p. 145)

Beck produces neologisms by transforming existing words into new parts of speech that make logical sense even if they are grammatically incorrect.

‘Paperassées et feuilletées’ are examples of his use of past participles, which appear frequently in both conventional and created forms. Sometimes they occur in the middle of lines, as in the case above, but they tend to appear at the ends of lines, often as masculine rhymes. To this anglophone reader translating the text, their frequency produced the sense of a stilted rhythm, which gestures towards rhyme but actually slows the pace of the poem, introducing pauses after which the reader needs to gather her forces ready to begin again. The effect is compounded by Beck’s use of odd-numbered and irregular line lengths, to the extent that when unambiguous octosyllables, decasyllables or the occasional alexandrine occur, they create a surprising moment of lightness in the reading process. An example of past participle usage and varying line lengths can be seen here:

Le banquet flotté, divisant, parle [9]
des immoraux de l’île : des mots dégèlent [10/11]
sur le chemin de l’eau. Au pays du départ, [11]
aucun feu ne chauffait luettes [8]
ou langues empesées. [6]
Les bouches étaient fermées [7]
par un hiver bloqué. [6]
A Intériorité d’air passé. [9/10] (*MG*, p. 136)

The manner in which those features dictate the pace and rhythm of reading is experienced in an embodied way before it can be discerned using rational methods such as counting syllables, and that justifies a cognitively stylistic approach in translating. Wagstaff here chose to use ‘ed’ or ‘t’ endings where possible, as these correspond semantically to past participles while also causing the reader to pause before moving on. Where it was not possible to use one, such as in the translation of ‘Intériorité’, where a ‘d’ only occurs in the middle of ‘Inwardness’, an effort was made to include one nearby where it had not formed part of the source text, using the technique

of compensation. In this instance she translated 'chauffait' with 'warmed' (although a southern French pronunciation of the 'ait' ending would in any case be indistinguishable aurally from 'é').

The drifted, tipping banquet speaks
of the island's sinners: words thaw
on the waterway. In the country of origin
no fire warmed the starchy
throats or tongues.
Mouths were closed
by an obstructed winter.
To Inwardness of air past. (*MG*, p. 137)

Although syllables are not counted in English, an attempt was made where possible to avoid structures that sound regular in English, such as in the following lines: 'of the island's sinners: words thaw / on the waterway. In the country of origin'.

One final feature of Beck's writing that this analysis will highlight is also related to rhythm. Beck tends to adopt one of the three standard question formations in French, where a question mark is added to a statement with no other changes in structure. When used for questions that span several lines of text, in combination with enjambement, this has the result of leading the reader to think that a statement is being made, only to find subsequently that it must be recast as a question. For instance, he writes:

(elle doit dompter les solives
comme un Orphée bruté
qui prépare des instruments ?) (*MG*, p. 138)⁴⁹

It is possible to form questions in this way in English, but much less common, so the translator decided to invert the structure even though it then became clear from the start of an utterance that a question was being asked :

(must it train the joists
like a beasted Orpheus
crafting instruments?) (*MG*, p. 139)⁵⁰

⁴⁹ 'Elle' refers to the action of sawing related by Thoreau in *Walden*.

⁵⁰ This is another example of a neologism: 'bruté' translated by 'beasted'.

An opportunity came to compensate for this loss outside the written text, however. Wagstaff was invited by Beck to read her translation alongside his reading of the source text at an event in May 2016. She chose to compensate for the obvious question structure in passages such as the one cited above by avoiding the expected rising inflection at the end of the question. Beck, who did use such an inflection in his French reading, despite the written structure that indicates a statement, commented on this specifically afterwards when praising the English reading for its moderate pace. He said that he would consider replicating the effect in his future readings of the text. In this very literal sense, then, an embodied interpretation of a text can constitute a justifiable translation approach, and even affect the future reception of the source text.

The inclusion of ‘Mots gelés’ in the translated anthology brings to a new English-speaking audience a text that is itself a hub connecting references from across languages and periods of Western culture. It puts Beck’s writing in dialogue with poetry with which he is not usually associated: he cannot be classified either as an exponent of new lyricism, or as a literalist writer. He is interested in voice and rhythm, but also ‘reuses’ existing texts. At the same time, he offers a perspective rooted firmly in the possibilities and limitations of the French language and its sounds that is likely to be difficult to ‘place’ for anglophone readers and thereby to broaden their understanding of what contemporary poetry can achieve.

Translating Anne-James Chaton’s ‘Vie de ...* d’après les écrits de Giambattista Vico’

Although Anne-James Chaton also ‘reuses’ existing texts, his creative output differs considerably from Beck’s poetic texts. Chaton is closer to the ‘literalist’ tendency in the contemporary French poetic scene. His poetics are influenced by the American Objectivists, such as Charles Reznikoff, and their interest in everyday writing and rejection of style. He is a performance poet who takes inspiration from the work of sound poets, in particular Bernard Heidsieck and Henri Chopin. He collaborates with musicians such as the English guitarist Andy Moor and Thurston Moore, guitarist and singer from American band Sonic Youth, and is signed to the German record label Raster-Noton. Many of his poetic texts are published by experimental publishers Al Dante, and in 2016 he published his first novel, *Elle regarde passer les gens* with Éditions Verticales. This text recounts the history of the twentieth century through the voices of thirteen iconic female figures without naming them. Every sentence begins with the female third person pronoun ‘elle’ and this constraint alludes to another influence: OuLiPo and notably Georges Perec, for whom Chaton openly expresses his admiration. Chaton’s work is little known in France outside the experimental music and poetry scenes. If he is known at all in the United Kingdom, it is for his

association with Raster-Noton. Under their aegis, he participated in a concert in 2011 at the Roundhouse in London.

In contrast to Wagstaff, Nina Parish had not written any academic articles about Chaton, although she had heard papers about his work⁵¹ and been to performances by other sound poets (Bernard Heidsieck, Christophe Tarkos, Jérôme Game, Jean-Pierre Bobillot). Little academic work has been published on Chaton so far and his work has not been translated into English.⁵² Like Wagstaff, Parish is not a poet and is a novice translator; her only translation before *Writing the Real* was a collaborative translation with English poet, David Clarke, of the opening pages of Michelle Grangaud's *Souvenirs de ma vie collective: Sujets de tableaux sans tableaux*, due for publication in *Double Change* 7. The experience of translating this text encouraged her to volunteer to work on a text by Chaton. Grangaud is an Oulipian and the constraints of her text meant that in many ways the translation had little to do with the original text in terms of semantic meaning but much more to do with rhythm and sounds. The constraint of this source text shaped the translation in unexpected ways, often forcing a freer, more creative rendition. The mechanical and 'poor' nature of some of Chaton's texts and constraints produces a comparable effect.⁵³

When approached to contribute to the Enitharmon anthology, Chaton graciously sent three texts from *Vies d'hommes illustres d'après les écrits d'hommes illustres*.⁵⁴ This publication consists of a book and five CDs but, as stated previously, although an audio-visual element could be considered for further volumes, this first anthology was to be textual, published solely in book form. *Vies d'hommes* recounts the lives of twelve illustrious men from Jesus Christ to René Descartes (one of these 'men' being Margaret Thatcher), through the rewriting of biographies of illustrious men after the writings of illustrious men, as stated in the title. For *Writing the Real*, Chaton sent the lives of Dante Alighieri, Christopher Columbus and Giambattista Vico, although

⁵¹ For example, Nathalie Wourm, 'La poésie YouTube d'Anne-James Chaton et Andy Moor', Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, 17/01/2014; Anne-Christine Royère and Gaëlle Théval, 'Le texte, le son, l'action, dans les "litanies du banal" d'Anne-James Chaton', University of Birmingham, 11/07/2014.

⁵² Articles on his work include: Jeff Barda, 'Espace de virtualités et essaim de singularités dans la poésie sonore et graphique d'Anne-James Chaton', in *Textures: Processus et événements dans la création poétique moderne et contemporaine*, ed. by Jeff Barda and Daniel Finch-Race, Modern French Identities 120 (Peter Lang : Bern, 2015), pp. 147–65. Nathalie Wourm includes an interview with him in *Poètes français du 21^e siècle: entretiens*, pp. 10–20.

⁵³ Barda discusses this idea of 'poor' literature in his study: 'Chaton s'empare de matériaux préexistants — de *ready-made* verbaux — tickets de caisse, notes de blanchisseries, numéros de téléphones, cartes de visite, reçus, etc., parmi d'autres formes de vie modeste — que l'auteur recopie, retranscrit, décontextualise et recontextualise. Chaton qualifie l'ensemble de ces documents d'écriture "très pauvres"' ('Espace de virtualités et essaim de singularités dans la poésie sonore et graphique d'Anne-James Chaton', p. 150). In his interview with Wourm, Chaton states: 'Ces écritures-là, qui sont des écritures jetables, très périssables, très pauvres, nous constituent collectivement malgré tout. C'est une langue qu'on parle tous et qu'on lit tous, et donc peut-être pouvons-nous fabriquer autre chose avec, et notamment la faire rentrer dans le champ de la littérature. Pourquoi est-ce qu'un ticket de caisse ne ferait pas partie, à un moment donné, de l'histoire de la poésie?' (*Poètes français du 21^e siècle: entretiens*, p. 14)

⁵⁴ Anne-James Chaton, *Vies d'hommes illustres d'après les écrits d'hommes illustres* (Marseille: Al Dante, 2011), hereafter *VHI* in the text

only one could be included because of space constraints. An important intervention on the part of the translator therefore came through the initial choice of text. The first step for choosing which to translate was to identify the *modus operandi* of each text. As Chaton's inclusion of Thatcher in his volume of lives of illustrious men attests, the translator had to bear in mind that a playful approach could be at work.

Although Chaton is known as a performance poet and is associated with sound poetry, it soon became obvious that these poems are very textual in their being; they perform the page. The first three lines of the first extract from 'Vie de Dante Alighieri d'après Giovanni Boccacio' illustrate this performative aspect:

dante alighieri, om tré illustr è remarkabl,
dign 2 louange, doneur è 2 gloir,
illustr citoy1 è Clebre, splendeur 2 litali, (VHI 32)

This poem takes the form of a type of phonetic transcription, reminiscent of work by Jean Dubuffet and Raymond Queneau, which uses random capital letters, textspeak and Italianate words. The initial translation step was to translate the poem into standard French (all lower case). The most effective method of making sense of these lines, underlining the tension between the written and spoken word in Chaton's creative output, was to read them out loud and to transcribe the oral version:

dante alighieri, homme illustre et remarquable,
digne de louange, d'honneur et de gloire,
illustre citoyen et célèbre, splendeur de l'Italie,

The text could then be translated into standard English (all lower case):

dante alighieri, illustrious and remarkable man,
worthy of praise, honour and glory,
illustrious citizen and famous, splendour of italy,

Once the standard English text had been reached, the translator could then experiment, attempting to transcribe phonetically and using textspeak abbreviations which are no longer so familiar to readers, as text messaging is no longer associated with using a limited number of characters:

dante alighieri, illustreyes & remarkabel man,
werthee ov praiz, oner & glawri,
illustreyes sitizen & Faimes, splendor ov itali,

The second text sent by Chaton was 'Vie de Christophe Colomb d'après Jules Verne'. This text proceeds by map coordinates and a video of Chaton performing this text can be seen on Youtube.⁵⁵ The opening lines of this poetic text are as follows:

QUATRIÈME VOYAGE

Le 9 mai 1502, départ de N36° 32' 1" W 6° 17' 58"

Le 20 mai, relâche dans l'île N 28° 0' 0" W 15° 30' 0".

Le 15 juin, arrivée en vue des îles S 17° 30' 0" W 149° 30' 0" et de l'île N 14° 40' 0" W 61° 0' 0". Passage en vue de l'île N 15° 30' 0" W 61° 20' 0", de l'île N 10° 15' 0" W 61° 22' 0" et de N 18° 14' 57" W 66° 30' 3". (*VHI* 41)

This text immediately raises questions of reading, understanding and performing texts. Parish could potentially translate these map coordinates, but she would not be able to communicate the voyage by reading them to herself or out loud.

The third text sent by Chaton was 'Vie de...* d'après Giambattista Vico'. This text takes the form of a riddle, based very closely on Vico's autobiography:

Mon 1^{er} tomba la tête la première du haut d'une échelle.
Mon 2^e eut la partie droite du crâne fracassée.
Mon 3^e faillit rester idiot.
Mon 4^e est d'un naturel mélancolique et pénétrant.
Mon 5^e fréquenta l'école de grammaire. (*VHI* 100)⁵⁶

It was the text chosen for the anthology, first because of its mechanical nature:

⁵⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BT_eImK8c9k> [last consulted: 18/07/2017].

⁵⁶ The text is reprinted, with the translation on facing pages, in *Writing the Real*, ed. by Parish and Wagstaff, pp. 100–07. Subsequent references will be to this volume.

My 1st fell head first from the top of a ladder.
 My 2nd had the right side of his cranium fractured.
 My 3rd almost remained an idiot.
 My 4th is of a melancholic and penetrating nature
 My 5th went to grammar school. (*VHI* 101)

The translation of its final line was also particularly challenging. Chaton gives seventy clues before revealing the riddle as an anachronistic joke: ‘Mon TOUT porte le nom d’une célèbre marque de chips*’ (*VHI* 106). At the bottom of the age, the riddle is revealed as: ‘* Réponse Giambattista Vico’. As well as being the name of the celebrated Italian humanist, Vico is the name of a popular brand of crisps in France. Chaton insists on the readability of poetry by bringing an otherwise little-read text — the autobiography of an early-eighteenth-century Italian thinker — into contact with an everyday food brand. Most anglophone readers, however, would not have the cultural knowledge to understand this, so the readability would be lost in a literal translation: ‘My WHOLE bears the name of a famous make of (French) crisps.’ Here, the riddle is not revealed and the striking contrast between the erudition of the riddle, its subject matter and the introduction of a packet of crisps into the poem vanishes. Parish chose a version that has little to do with the French original but gives more contextual information about the poet: ‘My WHOLE rhymes with the name of the singer of *I’ll Be Your Mirror**’ (*VHI* 107). This rendering is necessarily creative; Parish decided to depart quite radically from the original text to introduce Nico into her translation. She felt this choice was justified by Nico being part of the 1960s New York avant-garde music scene, thereby alluding to Chaton’s association with the contemporary experimental music scene. He is also part of a generation who is likely to have listened to the Velvet Underground. Because of the impossibility of providing a semantically accurate translation of this final line, this creative rendering uses a different technique of rhyme (N/Vico) in an attempt to produce another type of contrast and insert some contextual information into the poem.

Performance is obviously key to Chaton’s texts. He delivers his texts in a monotonous fashion so as not to endow them with intention, which is comparable in some ways to the rejection of style in his written texts.⁵⁷ This implies that he rejects the notion of inference; nevertheless, any attempt to translate his work reveals that there were aims behind their composition that might be inferred. Parish has chosen not to read her translation in public so far, but a collaboration with Chaton on this endeavour could be envisaged in the future.

⁵⁷ Wourm, *Poètes français du 21^e siècle: entretiens*, p. 20.

The three texts Chaton proposed for inclusion in the anthology all force the translator to be inventive: either to devise abbreviated language (Dante), or to ask what a translation is if the text consists of numbers (Columbus), or to choose a new solution to a riddle (Vico). In this way, he makes editors and translators question what translation might be when the requirement to convey rhythm, music or a sense of ‘presence’ is removed; it is not obvious that his translator needs to be a poet in the sense of a writer attuned to a particular poetic idiom. He also makes the reader question what poetry is: a text that appears to have been produced mechanically, and therefore requires a mechanical approach to translation, might at first seem too ‘easy’: is poetry not supposed to be difficult? Finally, he makes us wonder whether all poetry is translation: the explicit reuse of existing material in this text emphasises that no writing can exist independently of previous uses of language, however much the poet’s sense of presence might be central to his creativity. The translator, by producing a mechanical translation that mirrors the composition of the source text and introducing an essential creative aspect, reveals that the writing of poetry also requires these two elements: the rewriting of previous uses of language, and a core inventive touch.

Conclusion

The work of Anne-James Chaton appears very different from that of Philippe Beck: the former focuses on mechanical rewriting, the accessibility of poetry and playfulness, whereas for the latter rhythm and serious philosophical reflection emerge in texts that are deemed ‘difficult’.⁵⁸ But their juxtaposition in this anthology reveals unexpected similarities: both reuse existing texts; both have a wide frame of reference; both prize inventiveness; both their poems are forms of translation. These differences and similarities can be noted in the anthology without the label of ‘littéralité’ being attached to Chaton or ‘néo-lyrisme’ to Beck.

In this article, we aimed to demonstrate not only that a bilingual anthology can give little-known contemporary French poetry a presence in the UK poetic system, but also that such an anthology can have a liberating effect on the original French texts themselves. It divests them of the labels given to poetry that either searches for *présence* or, conversely, rejects the very notion of *présence*. In this way, our analysis offers a valuable development of Lefevere’s theory of anthologizing. It argues that a bilingual anthology can affect the source culture’s poetic system by giving writers a new audience who bring to their reading no preconceptions about the writers’ place in that system, and by showing source-language readers the texts in new contexts. As a

⁵⁸ It should be mentioned that the journal created by Beck in 1998, *Quaderno*, published texts by Chaton. See Wourm, *Poètes français du 21^e siècle: entretiens*, p. 8.

result, in this instance, readers of French and translated versions are confronted simply with poetry, rather than with examples of a circumscribed and classified national tradition.

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